

The establishment of Civil Air Patrol in December 1941 made no provision for the participation of youths under age 18.

## World War II and Postwar 1942-1949

However, an outpouring of interest by young men and women inspired CAP national commander Maj. Earle L. Johnson and national intelligence officer Capt. Kendall K. Hoyt to issue General Memorandum 58 on Oct. 1, 1942. This memorandum stated that any existing CAP unit could form a counterpart cadet unit. Male and female cadets, ages 15-18 in their final two years of high school could join.

The CAP cadet program proved a powerful force for imparting practical skills and preparing teenagers for the military—notably military aviation—and other wartime service agencies. Cadets learned preflight skills, military law, drill and ceremonies, first aid, Morse code and signals. In several instances, cadets participated alongside adult members on overdue aircraft searches and other emergency service missions. In 1943, CAP worked closely with the U.S. Army Air Forces to recruit 17-year-old men into the highly successful Air Corps Enlisted Reserve (ACER) who would be called to active duty after reaching 18. Female cadets, in turn, were recruited into the Women's Army Corps.

To support the cadet training, the USAAF provided additional resources, including 288 liaison-type light aircraft sporting military insignia for cadet orientation flights and recruiting. In summer 1944, 48 USAAF installations nationwide held one- to two-week encampments, which allowed nearly 9,000 selected cadets to experience military life while training and learning alongside active-duty servicemembers.

Postwar, the cadet program expanded its range of program. In 1948, 24 Civil Air Patrol cadets traveled to Canada for the CAP's first International Air Cadet Exchange (IACE), while an equal number of the Air Cadet League of Canada visited the United States. The IACE program, inaugurated in 1947, was designed to foster international goodwill and friendship among young aviation enthusiasts across the globe. 1948 also witnessed the first national and international CAP drill competitions, which featured squadrons from across the U.S. and Canada.



Throughout the 1950s, the CAP cadet program continued to prepare young people for service in the military and communities as the nation confronted the Soviet Union and communist influences. In 1950, CAP awarded its first Certificate of Proficiency (COP) to those cadets who completed a three-year training course. By decade's end, the COP became a priority measure for promotion to cadet officer grades and for participation in IACE.

## Cold War 1950-1975

Cadet membership also increased as the cadet program age limits expanded. In 1954, cadets aged 15-20 were permitted to participate, and three years later the age range grew to encompass cadets 14-21 years old. This range expanded again in 1962, allowing cadets as young as 13 to join the CAP. As a result, 1964 saw 52,977 cadets serving in the CAP — the cadet program membership high-water mark.

The year 1964 witnessed a transformation of the cadet program. Under the guidance of John V. "Jack" Sorenson of CAP National Headquarters, the organization redesigned and introduced a cadet program designed around four phases: aerospace education, moral leadership, physical fitness, and the leadership laboratory. As cadets advanced through the program, they promoted to higher levels of rank and responsibility. Those select cadets who completed the highest level of achievement received the Spaatz Award, named in honor of Gen. Carl A. Spaatz. To date, just more than 2,300 cadets have received this prestigious honor.

Beginning in the 1950s, CAP offered cadets increased opportunities for specialized training. In 1956, Pennsylvania Wing's Hawk Mountain Ranger School began training seniors and cadets in advanced search and rescue techniques. Most notable of all, Cadet Maj. Robert N. Barger participated in 1957's Operation Deep Freeze, becoming the first CAP cadet to fly over the South Pole! In 1967 during the Vietnam War, the Iowa Wing established a program known as the Blue Berets of ground team search and rescue and wilderness survival training. The following year, IACE welcomed female cadets for the first time.

The CAP cadet program endured through the cultural and social changes of the 1960s and early 1970s. Many youths were apathetic to the Vietnam War and grabbed onto a spirit of youth rebellion, which turned their interests away from CAP service. Too much classroom study and too few field activities also turned cadets away. Membership levels fell.

## Evolving For America 1976-now

To reverse that trend, CAP's leadership in the 1970s worked to make the cadet program appealing again. Orientation flights and summer encampments increased, and composite squadrons — where senior and cadet members worked and trained together — received new emphasis. In 1975, the cadet age range expanded to students in the seventh grade and, in 1977, to those in the sixth grade. In 1995, cadets became eligible to join at 12 and serve as cadets until the age of 21.

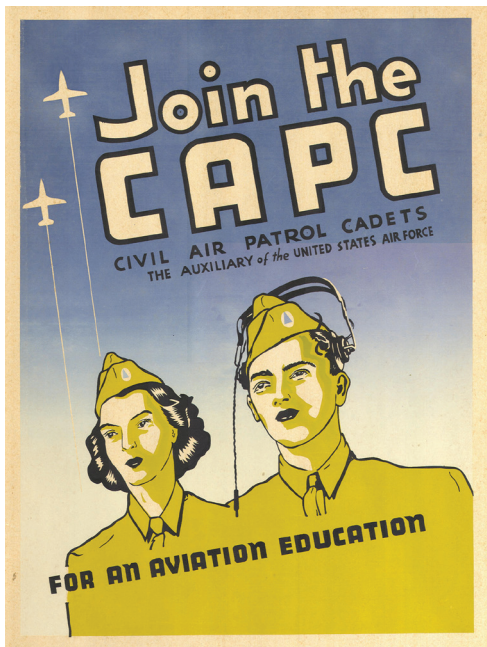
From the late 1970s into the new century, cadets could access an

impressive range of activities. The Air Force Academy Survival Course in Colorado, Hawk Mountain, the National Blue Beret program, IACE, CyberPatriot, and flight training scholarships translated into increased cadet numbers.

Cadet training remained valuable for those who chose to enlist in the Air Force, which in 1978 approved the award of the E-3 pay grade (Airman First Class) to those who earned the CAP Gen. Billy Mitchell Award as a CAP cadet. Under CAP's Youth Aviation Initiative launched in 2018, cadets can now earn their private pilot's certificate through the Cadet Wings program, helping to halt a national pilot shortage.

Today, cadets continue to serve and thrive as pillars of the Civil Air Patrol mission. Many of their forerunners reached incredible heights, including Medal of Honor recipients Edward C. Benfold and Euripides Rubio, Olympic silver medalist Clifton E. Cushman, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Michael E. Ryan, Gen. Jacqueline D. Van Ovost, Army Lt. Gen. Julius W. Becton Jr., Thunderbird pilot Col. Nicole M.E. Malachowski, Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James C. Binnicker, Rhodes Scholar Hila Levy, and astronauts Frank F. Borman and Eric A. Boe. All of these men and women began their journey to success as CAP cadets, and the future remains bright for the American youths who will continue this legacy into the future.





“I have watched the beginnings of the **Civil Air Patrol cadet program** with great interest and I am glad to see it supported and developed by an organization of public-spirited civilians.... Continued and growing familiarity of our coming generations with aviation and its problems is of great importance to our national health and security, both during the war and in the peace to come.”

President Franklin D. Roosevelt  
March 8, 1944



While there are many youth-oriented programs in America today, CAP's cadet program is unique in that it uses aviation as a cornerstone. Thousands of young people from 12 years through age 21 are introduced to aviation through CAP's cadet program. The program allows young people to progress at their own pace through a 16-step program including aerospace education, leadership training, physical fitness and character development. Cadets compete for academic scholarships to further their studies in fields such as engineering, science, aircraft mechanics, aerospace medicine, and meteorology, as well as many others.

Want to become a leader and citizen  
serving your community and nation?  
Visit [gocivilairpatrol.com](http://gocivilairpatrol.com) for more information  
on how to join a squadron in your area today.



**Civil Air Patrol**  
U.S. Air Force Auxiliary

National Headquarters  
105 S. Hansell St., Bldg. 714, Maxwell AFB, AL 36112

Learn more about CAP's history at [history.cap.gov](http://history.cap.gov)

# America's Future Leaders

## The Story of Civil Air Patrol's Cadet Program



**Civil Air Patrol**  
U.S. Air Force Auxiliary